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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the recent decrease in full-time enrollment in Canadian universities, this report focuses on aspects of the decline. It is noted that the decline has been almost exclusively in the fields of arts and sciences, with enrollment in professional programs (except education) growing. After a brief review of enrollment trends in the past two decades, it is noted that enrollment fell an estimated 3.5 percent over the previous year. Enrollment trends vary by province, but only in Quebec did enrollment rise in 1977-78; trends also vary by university with increases of 3.2 percent at one Ontario college and decreases of up to 7 percent elsewhere in the province. Graduate student enrollment was also down from previous years. Among reasons suggested for the downward trend are uncertain employment opportunities, with many graduates finding themselves having to take semi-skilled jobs. Also cited is a shift from university training to career oriented non-university programs; some students who obtain adequate summer employment choose to remain in their jobs rather than return to school. Education trends in the U.S. have paralleled the Canadian enrollment decline (with only women's enrollment increasing). Extensive tables detailing the trends are included. (PHR)

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1978-79 ENROLMENT TRENDS

AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

Prepared for the Colloquium on

"Data Needs for Higher Education in the Eighties" (March 26, 1979)

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For the second year in a row full-time enrolment at Canadian universities has declined, even though the source population, the 18-24 age group, increased by 155,000 between 1976 and 1978. This decrease varied substantially by province, university and level of study (in certain cases there was an increase). Of particular significance have been the shifts in the male/female enrolment pattern and changes by field or discipline of study.

The decline has been almost exclusively in arts and science subjects (only certain disciplines such as economics, continued to expand). In contrast, enrolment in professional programs, except education, continued to grow despite more rigorous admission standards instituted by many universities and wider use of quotas. The increase is most notable in management and administration programs, fine and applied arts, and law; demand to enter the health sciences has always been strong.

To understand present university enrolment, it is necessary to review trends over the last two decades. During the sixties Canadian universities underwent extraordinary expansion. Two factors contributed to this growth: 18-24 year olds, who make up about 80% of full-time students, increased by almost one million from 1.8 million in 1962-63 to 2.7 million in 1971-72 (Table 1). But even more important was the accelerating enrolment rate. The total post-secondary rate (related to the 18-24 age group) rose from 11% to 19% during the same 10 years. However, the growth pattern varied substantially by sex. The male rate was 13.5% in 1962-63; the female rate, 8.7%. By 1971-72 rates for men had increased to 22.3%; for women, to 14.6%. (Table 1 provides enrolment rates by sex and type of study for different age groups).

Table 1

Full-time University and Non-university Post-secondary Enrolment Rates by Sex Related to Relevant Age Group

1962-63 to 1978-79

Academic Year	Non-university 18-21			Undergraduate 18-21			Graduate 22-24			Total Post-secondary 18-24			18-24 Age Group (in Thousands)
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
1962-63	3.1	7.3	5.2	17.9	7.0	12.5	2.0	0.4	1.2	13.5	8.7	11.1	1,770.1
63-64	3.7	7.5	5.6	18.5	7.7	13.1	2.6	0.5	1.5	14.5	9.3	11.9	1,848.8
64-65	4.1	7.1	5.6	19.1	8.6	13.9	3.0	0.6	1.8	15.3	9.7	12.5	1,941.7
65-66	4.6	6.6	5.6	20.1	9.9	15.0	3.6	0.8	2.2	16.5	10.3	13.4	2,039.5
66-67	5.3	6.5	5.9	20.6	10.5	15.6	3.9	0.8	2.4	17.5	10.8	14.2	2,191.7
67-68	6.8	7.4	7.1	21.5	11.3	16.4	4.4	1.0	2.7	19.1	11.8	15.4	2,288.8
68-69	8.8	9.0	8.9	21.2	11.5	16.4	4.5	1.0	2.7	19.9	12.8	16.4	2,413.8
69-70	9.7	9.1	9.4	22.1	12.6	17.4	4.8	1.2	3.0	21.1	13.5	17.3	2,522.2
1970-71	11.2	10.0	10.6	22.2	13.0	17.6	4.9	1.4	3.1	21.9	14.3	18.1	2,623.4
71-72	12.0	10.3	11.2	22.9	14.0	18.5	4.9	1.4	3.2	22.3	14.6	18.5	2,688.8
72-73	12.6	11.2	11.9	21.7	13.8	17.8	5.0	1.6	3.3	22.3	15.3	18.8	2,729.6
73-74	12.8	11.5	12.1	21.3	14.2	17.8	5.0	1.7	3.3	22.2	15.9	19.1	2,799.2
74-75	12.4	12.1	12.3	21.0	14.9	18.0	4.7	1.8	3.2	21.8	16.8	19.3	2,891.7
75-76	12.6	12.5	12.5	21.4	16.0	18.7	4.7	1.9	3.3	22.1	17.7	19.9	2,975.5
76-77	12.5	12.7	12.6	20.8	16.4	18.6	4.6	2.0	3.3	21.7	18.0	19.8	3,046.7
77-78*	12.7	12.9	12.8	20.2	16.2	18.2	4.4	2.0	3.1	21.5	17.9	19.5	3,123.6
78-79*	N/A	N/A	N/A	19.7	16.0	17.8	N/A	N/A	2.9	N/A	N/A	19.1	3,201.0

Note: Includes foreign students; without them the rate would be lower, particularly for the graduate student age group (22-24) in recent years.

* Estimated

Source: Statistics Canada

As early as 1972-73 Canadian universities experienced a decline in the number of full-time students. However, the drop was marginal, and was succeeded by continued expansion in the following years. An important element of this enrolment growth was the more than doubling of foreign students from an estimated 14,000 in 1973-74 to close to 29,000 three years later (Table 2). If foreign students are not counted, the number of male university students has remained relatively constant since 1971-72. It was the increase of female students that accounted for the overall growth in university enrolment from 318,000 in 1973-74 to 346,000 in 1977-78 (excluding male and female foreign students).

Another trend during the seventies was the shift in areas of specialization (Tables 3 and 4). The number of males in arts and science dropped rather substantially, whereas females continued to increase until 1977-78. The overall decline in arts and science enrolment was steepest between 1976-77 and 1977-78: a 13.9% drop of male undergraduates, a 4.9% decrease of females. Preliminary data for 1978-79 indicate a similar decline.

Contrariwise, enrolment in some professional disciplines has continued to grow. For example, commerce and business administration went from 20,000 students in 1971-72 to 34,000 in 1977-78. At the same time, fine arts enrolment grew by 4,500. Particularly significant was the increase of female undergraduates in business administration: from 13.9% to 29.5%.[1]

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[1] These shifts toward job-oriented programs have recently been documented in Out of School - Into the Labour Force (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 81-570, 1978).

Table 2

Undergraduate and Graduate University Enrolment, by Sex,
1968-69 to 1977-78

	Male	Less Foreign Students	Sub-total	Female	Less Foreign Students	Sub-total	Total	Less Foreign Students	Total
1968-69	177,199 (66.7)			88,644 (33.3)			265,843 (100.0)		
1969-70	193,018 (65.6)			101,128 (34.4)			294,146 (100.0)		
1970-71	200,710 (64.9)			108,759 (35.1)			309,469 (100.0)		
1971-72	206,626 (64.0)			116,400 (36.0)			323,026 (100.0)		
1972-73	203,548 (63.1)			118,856 (36.9)			322,404 (100.0)		
1973-74	205,698 (61.9)	9,502	196,196	126,426 (38.1)	4,744	121,682	332,124 (100.0)	14,246	317,878
1974-75	209,532 (60.4)	11,727	197,805 0.8	137,454 (39.6)	5,855	131,599 8.1	346,986 (100.0)	17,582	329,404 3.6
1975-76	218,652 (59.0)	15,662	202,990 2.6	151,764 (41.0)	7,820	143,944 9.4	370,416 (100.0)	23,482	346,934 5.3
1976-77	217,346 (57.7)	19,172	198,174 -2.4	159,160 (42.3)	9,572	149,588 3.9	376,506 (100.0)	28,744	347,762 0.2
1977-78	213,150 (57.0)	19,092	194,058 -2.1	161,035 (43.0)	9,531	151,504 1.3	374,185 (100.0)	28,623	345,562 -0.6

Note: Figures in brackets show the sex breakdown; without brackets, they indicate the percentage change over the previous year.

The estimated foreign students have been deducted from each column since 1973-74. For earlier years no comparable figures are available.

Source: Statistics Canada: The number of foreign students has been derived from Immigration statistics.

Table 3

Full-time Undergraduate University Enrolment in Arts and Science by Sex, 1968-69 to 1977-78

	Male	Female	Total
1968-69	85,725	52,070	137,795
1969-70	91,693 (7.0)	57,346 (10.1)	149,039 (8.8)
1970-71	94,313 (2.9)	60,302 (5.2)	154,615 (3.7)
1971-72	92,653 (-1.8)	63,205 (4.8)	155,858 (0.8)
1972-73	89,039 (-3.9)	61,138 (-3.3)	150,177 (-3.7)
1973-74	89,460 (0.5)	63,220 (3.4)	152,680 (1.7)
1974-75	87,972 (-1.7)	66,702 (5.5)	154,674 (1.3)
1975-76	89,123 (1.3)	71,491 (7.2)	160,614 (3.8)
1976-77	85,652 (-3.9)	73,509 (2.8)	159,161 (-0.9)
1977-78	73,778 (-13.9)	69,933 (-4.9)	143,311 (-9.7)

Note: Percentage in brackets shows the change over previous year.

Source: Statistics Canada.

Table 4

Full-time Undergraduate Enrolment in Selected Professional Disciplines
by Sex, 1968-69 to 1977-78

	Business Administration			Engineering		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1968-69	13,755	1,227	14,982	24,469	397	24,866
	91.8	8.2	100.0	98.4	1.6	100.0
1969-70	14,754	1,363	16,117	24,677	399	25,076
	91.5	8.5	100.0	98.4	1.6	100.0
	(7.3)	(11.1)	(7.6)	(0.9)	(0.5)	(0.8)
1970-71	15,035	1,712	16,747	25,232	474	25,706
	89.8	10.2	100.0	98.2	1.8	100.0
	(1.9)	(25.6)	(3.8)	(2.2)	(18.8)	(2.5)
1971-72	17,386	2,803	20,189	25,986	649	26,635
	86.1	13.9	100.0	97.6	2.4	100.0
	(15.6)	(63.7)	(20.6)	(3.0)	(36.9)	(3.6)
1972-73	18,672	3,594	22,266	24,987	669	25,656
	83.9	16.1	100.0	97.4	2.6	100.0
	(7.4)	(28.2)	(10.3)	(-3.1)	(3.1)	(-3.7)
1973-74	20,616	4,561	25,177	25,050	865	25,915
	81.9	18.1	100.0	96.7	3.3	100.0
	(10.4)	(26.9)	(13.1)		(29.3)	(1.0)
1974-75	21,598	5,279	26,877	26,659	1,268	27,927
	80.4	19.6	100.0	95.5	4.5	100.0
	(4.8)	(15.7)	(6.8)	(6.4)	(46.6)	(7.8)
1975-76	23,197	6,777	29,752	29,095	1,707	30,802
	78.0	22.0	100.0	94.5	5.5	100.0
	(7.4)	(24.2)	(10.7)	(9.1)	(34.6)	(10.3)
1976-77	23,736	8,425	32,161	30,631	2,184	32,815
	73.8	26.2	100.0	93.3	6.7	100.0
	(2.3)	(28.5)	(8.1)	(5.3)	(27.9)	(6.5)
1977-78	24,149	10,110	34,259	32,288	2,623	34,911
	70.5	29.5	100.0	92.5	7.5	100.0
	(1.7)	(20.0)	(6.5)	(5.4)	(20.1)	(6.4)

Table 4

Full-time Undergraduate Enrolment in Selected Professional Disciplines
by Sex, 1968-69 to 1977-78

	Fine and Applied Arts			Law		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1968-69	1,047	1,412	2,459	5,231	504	5,735
	42.6	57.4	100.0	91.2	8.8	100.0
1969-70	1,903	2,508	4,411	5,752	707	6,459
	43.1	56.9	100.0	89.1	10.9	100.0
	(81.8)	(77.6)	(79.4)	(10.0)	(40.3)	(12.6)
1970-71	2,353	3,093	5,446	6,328	922	7,250
	43.2	56.8	100.0	87.3	12.7	100.0
	(23.6)	(23.3)	(23.5)	(10.0)	(30.4)	(12.2)
1971-72	3,457	4,048	7,505	6,609	1,155	7,764
	46.1	53.9	100.0	85.1	14.9	100.0
	(46.9)	(30.9)	(37.8)	(4.4)	(25.3)	(7.1)
1972-73	3,798	5,207	9,005	6,666	1,468	8,134
	42.2	57.8	100.0	82.0	18.0	100.0
	(9.9)	(28.6)	(20.0)	(0.1)	(27.1)	(4.8)
1973-74	4,137	5,763	9,900	6,735	1,718	8,453
	41.8	58.2	100.0	79.7	20.3	100.0
	(8.9)	(10.7)	(9.9)	(1.0)	(17.0)	(3.9)
1974-75	4,303	6,211	10,514	6,403	1,994	8,397
	40.9	59.1	100.0	76.3	23.7	100.0
	(4.0)	(7.8)	(6.2)	(4.9)	(16.1)	
1975-76	4,516	7,005	11,521	6,510	2,375	8,885
	39.2	60.8	100.0	73.3	26.7	100.0
	(5.0)	(12.8)	(9.6)	(1.7)	(19.1)	(0.7)
1976-77	4,677	7,161	11,838	6,527	2,767	9,294
	39.5	60.5	100.0	70.2	29.8	100.0
	(3.6)	(2.2)	(2.8)	(0.3)	(16.5)	(4.6)
1977-78	4,562	7,301	11,863	6,415	3,036	9,451
	38.5	61.5	100.0	67.9	32.1	100.0
	(2.5)	(2.0)	(0.2)	(1.8)	(9.7)	(1.7)

Note: Percentages in brackets show the change over the previous year.
Source: Statistics Canada.

Full-time 1978-79 university enrolment fell an estimated 3.5%[2] over last year (Table 5). However, each province or region has its own pattern. For example, Ontario and the Western provinces (except Saskatchewan) experienced steady declines since 1976-77. By contrast, between 1976-77 and 1977-78 there were increases in the Atlantic provinces and Quebec. But in the last year Quebec was the only province whose enrolment rose.[3]

The decline in Ontario between 1976-77 and 1977-78 may be partly attributed to the decrease in freshmen enrolment. Whereas total full-time enrolment fell by 3.5%, first year intake was down by 5.3%.* In contrast, full-time enrolment at the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology increased 4.0%, and similar growth (5%) is envisaged for 1978-79.

But there was substantial variation in Ontario by university (Table 6). The difference ranged from decreases of about 7% at Carleton, Laurentian and Windsor, to increases of 3.2% at Lakehead and 0.2% at Waterloo.[4]

At the graduate level the decline between 1976-77 and 1977-78 was more pronounced and preliminary information for 1978-79 indicates an even

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[2]Although the preliminary figures released by Statistics Canada and the Daily Bulletin of December 8, 1978 indicate a smaller decrease, these figures need to be adjusted to account for likely withdrawals. Based on historical trends this withdrawal rate is estimated at 1%.

[3]Quebec post-secondary education was restructured during the late sixties, and some of the consequences are only manifesting themselves now in enrolment patterns. Moreover, there is a distinction between anglophone universities where enrolment has levelled off, and francophone institutions which are still experiencing expansion, partly because of these structural changes.

[4]Lakehead's 3.2% increase is largely attributable to foreign students. It should be noted that full-time equivalent enrolment at Ryerson increased 8.4% between 1976-77 and 1977-78, and also grew in 1978-79, despite restrictions on the number of places available.

*See the OCUA report "The Ontario University System - A Statement of Issues".

Table 5

Annual Percentage Change of Provincial Full-time University Enrolment, 1976-77 to 1978-79

Province	1976-77	1977-78	Percentage Change	1978-79*	Percentage Change
Newfoundland	6,635	6,764	+1.9	6,197	-8.4
Prince Edward Island	1,478	1,542	+4.3	1,388	-10.0
Nova Scotia	18,214	18,334	+0.7	17,862	-2.6
New Brunswick	11,062	11,095	+0.3	10,696	-3.6
Quebec	77,639	81,403	+4.8	82,395	+1.2
Ontario	163,985	159,222	-2.9	153,682	-3.5
Manitoba	18,296	17,798	-2.7	16,709	-6.1
Saskatchewan	14,964	14,977	+0.1	14,392	-3.9
Alberta	32,549	32,128	-1.3	31,327	-2.5
British Columbia	31,684	30,922	-2.4	30,357	-1.8
Canada	376,506	374,185	-0.6	365,004	-2.5
Canada (excluding Quebec)	298,867	292,782	-2.1	282,609	-3.5

* Established from preliminary enrolment data and adjusted by 1% to account for possible withdrawals.

Source: Statistics Canada.

Table 6

Full-time Equivalent Undergraduate Enrolment
at Ontario Universities
1976-77 and 1977-78

	1976-77	1977-78	% Change from 1976-77
Brock	3,635.8	3,439.4	-5.4
Carleton	10,728.7	9,956.9	-7.2
Guelph	10,147.7	10,062.2	-0.8
Lakehead	3,469.6	3,580.5	3.2
Laurentian	3,761.2	3,482.0	-7.4
Algoma	488.9	464.0	-5.1
Nipissing	641.9	571.5	-11.0
Hearst	132.6	96.5	-27.2
McMaster	10,759.6	10,457.5	-2.8
Ottawa	12,944.1	12,562.2	-3.0
Queen's	10,683.1	10,543.1	-1.3
Toronto	31,920.9	30,643.6	-4.0
Trent	2,826.4	2,813.2	-0.5
Waterloo	13,808.2	13,829.8	0.2
Western	18,385.4	17,814.0	-3.1
Wilfrid Laurier	4,527.0	4,441.4	-1.9
Windsor	9,764.1	9,089.2	-6.9
York	16,364.4	15,446.0	-5.6
Total	164,989.6	159,293.0	-3.5

Source: Adapted from "The Ontario University System = A Statement of Issues" The Ontario Council on University Affairs, September, 1978, P.83.

larger percentage drop for most provinces. Table 7 shows that there were fewer graduate students in 1977-78 at Ontario universities than three years earlier, although again with considerable variation by institution. This decrease might have been greater were it not for foreign students.

Indisputably, full-time[5] university enrolment in Canada has declined and is declining. But why? There is no single answer. In fact, there are probably as many answers as there are young people who choose not to attend university. It is a matter of choice, and everyone has their own reasons for choosing. Nonetheless, many authors have suggested that an element contributing to the decline has been the uncertain employment opportunities for many recent university graduates. In the past, most arts and science graduates were employed in the public sector, including education. But such job prospects have decreased, and the young age structure of those now employed, limits replacement demand. Hence, the demand for university graduates has been substantially reduced. Slow growth of the Canadian economy during the last three years has also influenced the availability of employment.[6]

However, university graduates apparently enjoy a job market advantage. Between 1975 and 1977 the unemployment rate of university graduates in the 15 to 24 age group averaged 5.6%, compared with 25.1% for their

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[5]Part-time enrolment did not increase substantially between 1976-77 and 1977-78, and preliminary figures for 1978-79 indicate a decline.

[6]For example, the Canadian GNP, in real terms, increased by an average of about 4% between 1976 and 1978.

Table 7

Full-time Equivalent Graduate Enrolment at Ontario Universities
1974-75 to 1977-78

	1974-75 No.	1975-76 No.	Percentage Change	1976-77 No.	Percentage Change	1977-78 No.	Percentage Change
Brock	59.3	77.0	29.8	74.1	-3.8	60.2	-18.8
Carleton	887.3	1,147.7	29.3	1,127.3	-1.8	1,083.8	-3.9
Guelph	608.1	661.0	8.7	649.4	-1.8	593.6	-8.6
Lakehead	99.6	120.5	21.0	123.7	2.7	115.6	-6.5
Laurentian	62.9	68.0	8.1	65.9	-3.1	72.6	10.2
McMaster	1,461.6	1,451.4	-0.7	1,347.9	-7.1	1,246.7	-7.5
Ottawa	1,580.4	1,663.1	5.2	1,788.8	7.6	1,653.5	-7.6
Queen's	1,133.0	1,140.0	0.6	1,174.5	3.0	1,154.9	-0.7
Toronto	4,523.4	4,553.7	0.7	4,434.3	-2.6	4,329.6	-2.4
Trent	13.5	16.2	20.0	21.7	34.0	26.4	21.7
Waterloo	1,234.2	1,385.5	12.3	1,304.7	-5.8	1,129.9	-13.4
Western	1,614.6	1,620.2	0.3	1,606.4	0.9	1,644.0	2.3
Wilfrid Laurier	191.1	212.8	11.4	283.2	33.1	273.8	-3.3
Windsor	528.6	595.0	12.6	595.5	0.1	642.9	8.0
York	1,390.4	1,547.7	11.3	1,605.3	3.7	1,456.5	-9.3
OISE	979.9	995.6	1.6	1,071.0	7.6	1,107.8	3.4
Total	16,367.9	17,255.4	5.4	17,273.7	0.1	16,591.8	-3.9

Source: Adapted from "The Ontario University System - A Statement of Issues", by the Ontario Council on University Affairs, September, 1978, pp. 87-88.

contemporaries with less than Grade 9.

But the unemployment rate indicates only whether an individual has a job, any job. Traditionally, university graduates could expect professional and white collar positions. Now, in a tight labour market, those with university education may merely be displacing those with less schooling. Many recent university graduates have accepted semi-skilled or clerical jobs. Their example has discouraged others from pursuing a university degree. The shift to career-oriented non-university programs implies that instead, young people are seeking the type of training that will help them get a job.[7] Another indicator of their desire to succeed on the labour market is the apparent tendency for those who have obtained adequate summer employment to continue working and not to return to university. Together these factors may have contributed to the decline in university enrolment in 1978-79.

It should be remembered that the 18-24 age group will continue to grow until 1982-83. However, as already noted, an increasing source population is no guarantee of rising enrolment. Thus, it is difficult to make projections for the next few years. But, the age group will decline by more than 20% during the latter half of the eighties and the early nineties. A decline in university enrolment seems likely unless there is a remarkable jump in the enrolment rate or a substantial increase in part-time study.[8]

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[7] A forthcoming study, Student Withdrawals from Canadian Universities: A Study of Studies, by Charles E. Pascal and Seymour Kanowitch, discusses withdrawal from Canadian universities.

[8] In the past a sizeable group of part-time degree students were public sector employees, notably teacher. This group has by now upgraded their education, and consequently, will not undertake so much part-time degree study.

It is interesting to note that the United States universities have experienced a similar pattern of enrolment trends. The American institutions at the higher education level experienced slight declines in full-time enrolment in 1972-73, and 1976-77. In 1977-78 numbers rose 1.4%, but male enrolment declined by 1.2%, whereas female increased 4.5%.[9] Preliminary 1978-79 data suggest little change over the previous year. However, graduate enrolment seems to have declined further. As in Canada, behavioural and labour market factors have produced considerable uncertainty about the direction enrolment will take.

This overview has offered only a partial explanation for recent trends in university enrolment. More rigorous analysis is obviously needed. In particular, present attrition rates should be re-interpreted in light of structural and cyclical changes in the economy. These changes seem to have had an impact on the demand for university education, especially for professional and vocational orientated programs.

During the 60's and early 70's university education was regarded by many primarily as a sound investment decision with less emphasis on the consumption benefits higher education generates. In recent years, the focus is shifting again to the intrinsic elements, e.g., civic and cultural dimensions of university education, and this has for some led to a reassessment of its potential value.

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[9] This change varied by type of institution (university, four- and two-year colleges) and by control (private or public). Moreover, the quality of the data has been questioned.

This uncertainty and the re-orientation which have taken place are contributing factors in recent enrolment trends. Therefore it is difficult at this point to project, on account of these behavioural variables alone, the likely university enrolment trend for the next few years.[10]

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[10] This overview article does not explore different enrolment patterns by size of universities, nor by the age of the institutions. It also does not address itself to the question of interprovincial mobility, nor to the shifts in the socio-economic origins of university students.